Justin Camp

Rainy Nights

RAINY NIGHTS

A COMPILATION OF SHORT STORIES
BY
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This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and events either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, alive or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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FOREWORD

In my literary opinion Edgar Allen Poe set the standard as far as short stories go. He proved that you don't have to write a five hundred to one thousand page novel to get your point across or just to tell a story. I got my first book of his when I was in grade school and I still enjoy his works today. I guess you could say he was the main part of my inspiration to write short stories. The ability to tell a story and add horror suspense or heartbreak in just a few short pages is definitely an art form. In no sense am I comparing my self to the late Mr. Poe, don't misunderstand me, I'm just saying he is the best and everyone follow in his footsteps. So now come along with me dear reader, turn off the lights save for one to read by, get in a comfortable place, and perhaps you might just feel a slight chill from these stories. I think I can hear the first few raindrops of the coming storm, can you?

Justin Camp
February 10, 2010

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For Mama Joyce, who always read my stories even though she didn't like the scary ones…

THE STRANGER IN THE WOODS

The stranger knocks at midnight and on the third night he comes for you. The children living at 800 Baker Avenue were about to find out that the words of this bedtime story their father had told them were not words of fiction.

Johnny and Susie Walker loved **scary.** Scary movies, scary stories, scary games. You name it—if it was scary—they wanted to be a part of it. But after what they were about to experience, they wouldn't be so fond of scary much longer. Johnny was twelve and his sister, Susie, was ten. They lived with their father, Larry, in the small town of Emerson, Alabama. Their house was placed on a two acre estate with the woods running along either side.

One night before bed, Johnny asked his father to tell him and his sister a scary story.

"I don't know if you two need to hear a scary story before bed," Larry answered. "It might give you nightmares."

"No, it won't Daddy," Susie spoke up. "We aren't scared."

"Ok, if you insist. But I'm going to warn you, this is a true story. Once I tell you this story, certain actions are put in motion that can't be stopped. The events in the story will come to pass."

"Yeah, whatever, Dad. Just tell us the story," Johnny said.

"Alright, but don't say I didn't warn you," said Larry. "This is the story of the stranger in the woods."

A long time ago there were two children about your age. They were brother and sister and their names were Max and Lillie. The children lived in their home by the woods with their mother, Sara. One night Max could not fall asleep. He was tossing and turning and his mind would just not stop. Then, lying on his back and staring at the ceiling, he heard a loud knock at his window. It was the window on the

side facing the woods from which the knock came. Max looked at the clock and saw that it was twelve o'clock on the dot. He went to Lillie's room to see if she had heard it, but she was fast asleep. Max figured it was just some animal that had come from the woods. If he had only known the ironic truth in that statement. The boy finally fell asleep and didn't wake until morning.

They had pancakes and milk for breakfast and after that Max and Lillie spent the whole day playing. That night Max could not sleep again. He had a very bad feeling in the pit of his stomach. Then at midnight the knock at his window came again. It scared him this time. He felt that even though some animals are creatures of habit, they were not smart enough to do the exact same thing at the exact same time two nights in a row. He slowly walked over to the window and looked through the blinds. However, Max didn't see anything but deep shadows. He climbed back in bed and fell asleep once again.

At breakfast the next morning, Max told his mother about the sounds he had heard the previous two nights. She told him that he was just being paranoid and that the house creaks and pops sometimes.

"There's nothing to be afraid of," Sara assured him.

Once again Max and Lillie spent the afternoon playing and swimming. For some strange reason a calm had come over Max that night. He just knew there would be no knock at his window. However, he waited until twelve just to be sure. When the clock struck twelve there was no knock at his window, but what did come was far worse. A dark shadow came for Max that night and he was never seen again. "The stranger knocks at midnight and on the third night he comes for you."

"Wow, that was a good one, Dad," Johnny said.

“True stories are always the best,” Larry answered.

“Whatever, Dad. You’re just trying to scare us,” said Susie.

“If that’s what you think,” said Larry. “But they say once the story is told, the stranger comes. Okay. Time for bed.”

Johnny and Susie had adjoining rooms at the right end of the house. They each had a window that faced the woods. That night Johnny could not go to sleep. All he could think about was that stupid story. And then at midnight, the knock at the window came. Oddly, he had half expected it.

“My dad is so pathetic,” Johnny thought to himself. “He would go this far just to scare me.” Soon after this, Johnny lay his mind to rest and went into a deep sleep.

The three sat down to breakfast the next morning at nine o’clock. Their father was off

this day so they all ate together. Wanting to appease his father, Johnny started telling Susie of the events of the past night, even acting scared.

"Susie, last night someone knocked at my window! I think it was the stranger."

"Are you serious?" Susie asked unbelievingly.

"Dead serious," Johnny answered in a low tone.

Their father just smiled. Susie didn't believe him because she figured Johnny was just trying to scare her.

Other than scary, Johnny and Susie loved sports. Baseball was their favorite. They liked watching the Atlanta Braves play on T.V. The two of them would go outside and imitate the line-up and pitch to each other. That afternoon they were doing just that.

“Giles is up to bat. Two outs in the bottom of the ninth. Runners on the corners,” Johnny said before the pitch. “John Smoltz on the mound……and the pitch.” Johnny threw a wild pitch that went over the back stop.

“Dang it!” Johnny yelled angrily.

Susie ran to get the ball and Johnny threw his glove down in pure frustration. When he looked toward the corner of the woods, a wild pitch was the farthest thing from his mind. He saw a dark shadow of a man standing there. In his mind he thought, “The stranger knocks at midnight and on the third night he comes for you.” Quickly, he looked at his house, still thinking it was his father. But he could see his father through a window moving about in the house. As he looked back at the woods, the shadow was gone.

“Johnny, I got the ball,” Susie said walking up to him. “Are you okay?”

“Oh yeah. Sorry Sue. I just got distracted

for a sec. No big deal."

"What was it?" she asked.

"Nothing, uh, don't worry about it," he answered.

That night before bed, Johnny was still thinking about the knock at his window and what he had seen in the edge of the woods. But tonight he had an idea that he had to try—just to be sure. He walked into Susie's room and asked for her help.

"Hey Susie," Johnny said kindly, "Will you do me a big favor?"

"Yeah, what is it?" she asked.

"I think Dad is trying to scare me so I want you to act like you're scared and go sleep with Dad tonight."

"Okay."

"And Sue, make sure he stays in bed."

At bedtime Susie went to her father's room and did what her big brother had asked of her. Now all Johnny had to do was wait. He lay in bed with his mind racing, thinking about everything that had happened and all the 'what-if's. At midnight the knock came once again. As soon as he heard the knock, he ran to his father's room and, to his surprise, he saw his father lying there with Susie by his side. They were both fast asleep.

Johnny awoke the next morning with Susie sitting on the foot of his bed. "Did Daddy try to scare you last night?" she asked excitedly.

"No Sue, he didn't. You did a good job though. Thanks," Johnny tiredly answered.

"No problem. Anytime big brother."

That morning they watched a movie—Pirates of the Caribbean. That afternoon they played their baseball game again. After that they were hot so they swam. But no matter

what they did, the stranger was still lurking in the darkness in the back of Johnny's mind.

At supper, Johnny could not eat. His stomach was in jumbles. For some reason he felt like this would be his last meal. He climbed into bed knowing it would be his last time doing so. He just laid in bed and waited for the inevitable. As the time drew near, he watched the minutes tick away. Eleven fifty-seven, eleven fifty-eight, eleven fifty-nine, Midnight. He looked past his clock to the doorway of his room. What he saw made his body go numb. A dark silhouette of a man was standing there. He was ice cold. He had never felt fear like this before. As he lay there, paralyzed, he heard the shadow speak in a low growl of a voice.

"The stranger knocks at midnight and on the third night he comes for you."

The stranger stretched out his arm towards Johnny and started to walk forwards. As he got closer Johnny knew his life was about to come to an unnaturally early end. When the stranger

reached Johnny's bed he grabbed the boy with amazing speed and…….

Johnny Walker woke up in his bed, wet from a cold sweat. "What on earth would make me have such a weird dream?" he thought to himself. "The stranger in the woods, that's crazy. My Dad doesn't make up stories *that good*."

As most people do when they wake up from a deep sleep during the night, Johnny looked over at his clock on the nightstand. Immediately, the clock struck midnight and the words, "The stranger knocks at midnight and on the third night he comes for you," ran through his mind. Just about that time he got an unsettling feeling and then….**he heard a knock at his window.**

THE END

BLACK RAIN

I

Dim, dark clouds blow across the sky, cutting off sunlight from the ground. A strong, stiff wind whistles through the trees, rustling leaves as the breeze dances upon the tree limbs. There's a brilliant flash of lightning followed by low rumbling thunder. The black rain is coming and there is no way to stop it. As the storm clears and the thick fog is rising from the ground, you know someone else has disappeared.

II

Brian Helms grew up in a home that had no justice. His father was a drunk that abused Brian's mother. She finally left when he was fifteen and she couldn't take the beatings anymore. Brian hated his father for driving his mother away and never could find forgiveness in his heart. When Brian was twenty-one, his father died. The alcohol had turned his liver into shriveled mush. As far as Brian was concerned, his father *got his.* Seeking justice at the young age of twenty-four, Brian became a deputy in his tiny country town of Black Rain, Mississippi.

This little town got it's name from the weather. It might only rain twice a month but when it does—it's torrential. There is no such

thing as a light rain. Even if it is in the middle of the afternoon, it gets black as night.

Years passed by and Brian enjoyed his job. There wasn't much crime at all in town but the little things that did happen, he found an inner calm in righting the wrong. At the age of forty-one he was promoted to Sheriff of Black Rain. Two years in office went by without a hitch. A few drunken disputes, a domestic disturbance, and of course old lady Johnson's cat getting stuck in the tree was all easily handled. Then one summer day, the clouds rolled in and brought an evil that this town had never seen. Something the towns people would never even dream of—something that could *never* happen in the little town of Black Rain did happen.

III

The call came over the C B radio around seven forty five in the morning. Brian was finishing his first cup of coffee when he heard the dispatcher's rattled voice.

"Sheriff Helms!"

"Yeah, Sherrill. Go ahead." The town was so small it only had two or three dispatchers so all the officers knew who it was when they heard the voice.

"Um…we got a disturbing call just a minute ago."

"You sound kind of freaked out Sher. Tell me what happened."

"Dot Taylor just called. She said Steve is *gone.*"

"Gone? What do you mean—gone?"

"She said he's missing, vanished into thin air, *gone!*"

"Okay. Well tell her to come down to the station and we'll talk. I'm on my way. Over and out."

IV

The rain had just stopped about a half hour before the alarming CB conversation. The roads were still slick and Brian was in a fight with the car to keep it on the road. Every time the car hit a puddle, it wanted to slide off the pavement. On the drive to the station Brian was lost in thought. It perplexed him that someone could just up and vanish. He was a down-to-earth person. The thought of a supernatural phenomenon was the furthest thing from his mind. His name was not Fox Mulder and ghost hunts and alien abduction were not on his agenda. After a drive that seemed to have last an eternity, Sheriff Helms pulled into the police station.

V

There were anxious looks on the faces of his officers and secretary when he walked in.

"Mornin' Nancy. You alright?" Brian asked.

"I'm a little weirded out. This sort of thing don't happen around here." She replied.

"Now don't worry your pretty little face about anything. Everything is gonna be okay. Steve probably just had a little too much to drink or went for a long walk or something." He said that with the utmost confidence but deep down he knew there wasn't a syllable of truth in what he had just said.

"Alright, I'll try to stay calm, Sheriff. Dot is waiting for you in your office. It's gonna take more than words to calm her down."

"Thanks Nancy."

Sheriff Helms turned and started walking towards his office. As he got there he stopped, grabbed the handle, took a deep breath and entered.

VI

Dot Taylor's back was facing the door but when Brian walked in, her head swung around in such whiplash speed it gave the moment an "Exorcist" feel to it and Brian almost took a couple of steps back.

"Oh thank God you're here!" She exclaimed. "I think I'm going out of my mind."

"Can I get you anything, Dot? Coffee, water?" He asked.

"No. I wouldn't be able to keep it down. I just want my husband back." Her eyes started to fill with tears.

"Ok. Just calm down and start from the beginning."

"Alright. Well, yesterday afternoon he had been out in the fields preparing for the storm. He came in around five o'clock and read until suppertime. We ate fried chicken, green beans,

and okra. After I washed dishes, we sat on the front porch and listened to the crickets. Everything was fine. We went to bed about nine-thirty. The rain started around four in the morning and I felt Steve get up. However, there was nothing unusual about that because he always gets up in the middle of the night to go to the bathroom. I went back to sleep and didn't awake until morning. Steve was nowhere to be found."

"Well the next thing to do is take a little ride out to your house and let me have a look see. Come on. We'll take my car.

Although calm and collected on the exterior, a strong uneasiness was growing in the pit of his stomach.

VII

Once at the Taylor's home, a classic farmhouse with a decaying picket fence in front, Sheriff Helms tried to get a feeling of what Steve might have done. He went in the bedroom pretending he was Steve sleeping. He went to the bathroom trying to reenact the path Mr. Taylor might have taken. A thorough scan of the bathroom turned up no clues. Next he went to the kitchen, then to the back porch. Any footprints there might have been had been washed away by the black rain. As he started to walk back inside, he heard the Taylor's dog, a light brown retriever named Goldy, barking. Brian turned around in time to see Goldy come out of the fields and something read in it's mouth caught Brian's attention. As the retriever got closer and finally was on the porch with the Sheriff, it dropped a large red bedroom slipper from his mouth. Brian's heart skipped a beat and he lost his breath.

"This can't be," he thought to himself. He

rushed into the fields screaming Steve's name but knowing he would get no answer. After about ten minutes he finally stumbled across a pair of boxers and a white undershirt just laying there in a pile. When he confirmed with Dot that these articles of clothing were in fact Steve's, Brian organized the biggest search party this little town had ever seen. They searched every inch of that farm until dark. When the sun went down they got flashlights and searched through the night. After a week of searching they had to give up.

All the years of injustice came back to Brian in one exasperating disappearing act. Now, Steve Taylor only existed in the minds of those who cared about him.

VIII

Weeks passed and Brian still beat himself up for not being able to save Steven Taylor. Then it got worse. The black rain came through again. This time a little girl went missing, Jessica McArthur. It was the same deal—only a pile of clothes where her body had been before she vanished into thin air.

Two and a half weeks passed before the black rain came through again but this time no locals disappeared. Sheriff Helms sighed in relief but was still terribly shaken inside from the recent tragedies. A week later he received a phone call from a woman named Jennifer Bone. She informed him in a horrified voice that her husband, Oliver, called her from a pay phone in this little town on his way home from a business trip but never made it home. He had placed his call the day of the last storm. Brian could not move. The only words he was able to utter were, "He's gone." He hung up the phone as she

started to cry. Brian sat down at his desk, pulled out his service revolver and chambered a round. He finally realized there would never be any justice in this world, so he opened his mouth and swallowed a silver bullet in hope of finding justice in the next.

IX

Whether you're planning to visit this little town or you're just passing through, my advice to you is to turn on your radar and check the forecast. Even though so much is still a mystery, one thing is forever a certainty. When the dim dark clouds blow across the sky, as strong stiff winds whistle through the trees, and a brilliant flash of lightning followed by rumbling thunder makes your very soul tremble, you know the black rain is coming and there is no way to stop it. As the storm clears, deep down inside you the disquieting knowledge is there. SOMEONE ELSE HAS DISAPPEARED!

THE END

THE SUNSET

PART ONE

World War two caused many tragedies. Among these were cities being destroyed, loss of innocent life, and a fiery hatred between nations that has lasted until the present. Another tragedy was that loved ones were separated. Husbands from wives, parents from children. It also separated those that were on the dawn of a new love. All love is beautiful but there is no other quite like new love. During this time you are discovering, the one you love, and are experiencing a melange of different emotions unlike any you have ever felt. I haven't felt that in a long time, I'm an old man now. Oh, I do apologize, sometimes I ramble on and on and forget what I wanted to talk about. I wanted to tell you a story. This is the story of someone I hold very dear to my heart.

PART 2

Emily Hilton was nineteen years old when her family moved to Seacrest, Rhode Island. Roger, her father, had gained his father's inheritance so over the course of a week they became wealthy. They lived in Texas and hadn't had much materially because Rogers father hadn't helped them. Luckily though He left his son his oil company and all the money that came along with it. Roger sold the company and wanted to get out of Texas. The year was 1940 when they moved. Wanting a change of scenery, Roger, Bethany, his wife, Emily and their cat, Roosevelt, in honor of the current president, moved to the small town in Rhode Island. They had not been wealthy long, "new money", you could call it, so they didn't act like rich Texas snobs. They bought a nice two-story house overlooking the ocean. It was set on a huge sea cliff that had a white and red lighthouse set off to the right.

World War two was in full force in Europe. “Hitler and his nazi thugs” as President Roosevelt called them, were trying to take over that continent in their attempt to rule the world. However the United States still refused to fight.

Emily was a strong willed person and sometimes she was down right stubborn. But she was a caring and loving person at heart. She hadn’t wanted to leave Texas, she even threatened that she would never speak to her parents again if they made her move, but that didn’t last long. She loved writing and reading poetry, it was her passion. Emily never showed any of her work to anyone, she kept it all to herself. Her room had a view of the ocean so she set her writing desk up at the window so she could write and gaze peacefully out at the sea. Most of the friends that she had left back in Texas were either in love or already engaged. Emily on the other hand had no one. She wondered if there was anybody out there for her. Emily pondered this sometimes while staring starry eyed out the window at the water below.

The Hiltons had moved to Seacrest in the fall of 1940. Being from Texas, they had not known to prepare for the cold, icy winter that would follow the beautiful autumn. After the first snowfall they ended up needing a few things from the local grocery store. To get there, it was about a ten-minute drive through a hilly, windy section of the road and then a short, straight stretch into town. Roger decided he would be able to maneuver across the icy road so he got in his car and left.

"Be careful, honey," Bethany called out to her husband from the doorway.

"You know I will be," Roger assured her. "I'll be back within an hour."

"Okay. Bye-bye."

Roger started the car and slowly pulled out of the driveway and out of sight. After ten minutes of driving, he was coming down the last hill and could see the town. Suddenly his back

tire hit an icy patch in the road and he totally lost control of his vehicle. He fishtailed back and forth trying to regain control of the wild tin death trap his car had become. The back of the car finally slid all the way around, twirling him right off the road and into a huge tree.

Bethany became concerned after an hour and a half had passed. After another half-hour she was beside herself with worry. Then came a knock at the front door. She opened it to find a young, handsome man in his early twenties carrying Roger in his arms.

"Come in! Come in! What on earth happened?" Bethany cried.

"I found him a few minutes ago," the young man said. "He had crashed into a tree just outside of town. He's unconscious and I think his leg is broken but I think he'll be okay."

As he said that, Emily came down the stairs. Their eyes met and something inside her head told her that he was the one. She thought

that was stupid since she had never seen him before and so tried to shrug it off. Then she saw her father lying there and she rushed to his side.

"What happened?" she cried.

"Your father ran off the road and hit a tree. This young man helped him and brought him home," Bethany answered.

Roger came to as Bethany was telling the story.

"What's going on? Why am I on the couch?" Roger inquired. "Ouch! My leg!"

"Don't try to move it sir. I Think it's broken," said the young man.

"Who are you? What are you doing here?"

"My name is Aaron Parker. I pulled you out of your car and brought you here."

"You were going in and out of consciousness. When I asked where you live, you gave me this address."

"I guess that makes you my hero. Honey, let's treat my new hero to dinner."

"Of course dear, but what about your leg?"

"We'll have to wait for the roads to clear to get to a doctor."

As Bethany prepared dinner, the other three sat around the fireplace conversing. Emily and Aaron were both strongly attracted to each other. Neither one of them had ever felt that pull to a member of the opposite sex before. If you don't believe in 'love at first sight' this story will make you a believer.

Aaron Parker was not wealthy. He lived with his father, Sam, in a small house right outside of town. Aaron was 21 and worked with his father at the Seacrest Steele Mill. He was a mannerly and gentle young man and was well

respected by those in town who knew him. His mother had run out on him and his father when he was six because she was not content with what Sam had to offer. Aaron hadn't had any kind of woman in his life since then. He wanted somebody to love and to be loved for who he was. He and Emily were perfect for each other.

After dinner Aaron got ready to leave. "That was a delicious supper Mrs. Hilton. I thank you all for your hospitality."

"Our hospitality!" Roger said. "Boy, you saved my life. Feeding you dinner was the least thing we could do."

"Well I better get going. My father is probably wondering where I am. Thanks again. Goodbye."

"Goodbye," Mr. and Mrs. Hilton said in unison.

"Goodbye, Aaron," said Emily.

“Goodbye, Emily,” Aaron replied with a half smile.

Out walked Aaron, the man of her dreams—out the door and out of her life—so she thought.

The next day about mid morning there was a low knock at the front door. Bethany answered and was surprised to find Aaron standing there. When Emily heard who it was she came running down the stairs so fast she almost tripped over her own two feet and then tried to play it cool when she got to the door.

“Aaron, what are you doing here?” she asked.

“I came to check on your father…….and to give you these,” he said as he handed her a bouquet of flowers.

“Oh my, they’re gorgeous! Thank you so much,” she exclaimed.

“They were just so beautiful and I thought of you.”

“Oh Aaron,” she blushed.

This went on every day until her father got better. They spent each day together. In six months they knew each other inside and out. They were definitely perfect for each other. Everything was perfect and then in May of 1941, Aaron dropped a bomb on their relationship. They had had lunch that Thursday and then spent the rest of the day together. At sunset he took her out to the little bench at the lighthouse overlooking the sea.

“Emily, I love you but there’s something I have to tell you.”

“Okay, What is it babe?”

“Before I met you I had no one. I signed up for the Navy thinking it would be good for me. Things got delayed and I never heard from them. Two days ago I got a phone call and I’m being

sent to Hawaii in one week. I'm going to Pearl Harbor."

Emily started to cry, "But....but...what about us? I can't be with anybody else but you."

"You don't have to be. It's only a one year term. May 1942 will roll around and I'll be back and everything will be perfect." As he dropped to one knee, he asked, "Emily, will you marry me?"

"I....um...."

"Promise me under this beautiful sunset that you will be here when I get back and you'll marry me."

"Okay. I promise."

And then they kissed as the sun went down.

One week later he left for Pearl Harbor. They wrote to each other everyday and despite the distance they became closer and closer and

longed for each other even more. Then , on December 7, the day she hoped would never come—came. Pearl Harbor was attacked and Aaron Parker was right in the middle of it. Three days after the attack Sam Parker was informed that his son had died. Emily was devastated. For the next week she didn't even come out of her room. Her mother just sat food outside her door. She just couldn't take the pain and loneliness.

After the first week, she sneaked out of the house and went down to the lighthouse and the little bench where Aaron had proposed. She sat there for hours and cried. Finally, she made up her mind and walked to the edge of the cliff. She looked down at the waves crashing against the jagged rocks below and then…..she stepped off the edge.

The next morning Bethany decided that it was time for Emily to come out of her room. She walked upstairs and knocked on Emily's door. When there was no answer she tried the knob. Every other morning it had been locked but this

morning it wasn't. She walked into the perfectly clean room only to find it empty. She found two envelopes on the bed. One said 'Mom and Dad' and the other said 'Aaron'. Bethany went back down stairs and read the letter with Roger.

Dear Mom and Dad,

I know this is not how you wanted me to die but we cannot always have what we want. All I wanted was Aaron and that was taken away. I can't be with him in this life so I leave and hope to find him in the next. I love you both.

Your daughter,

Emily

Roger and Bethany were devastated. They had lost their little girl.

Four days after Emily's death there was a knock on Sam Parker's door. When he answered, it was Aaron!

"My boy!" Sam shouted. "But you're dead."

"No Dad. The navy must have got the names switched. I'm here—home," he said with a smile.

"Then where have you been?"

"I banged my head in the attack and have been in a coma. I couldn't contact you."

"Son it's so good to have you back."

"Dad, I have to go see Emily."

Starting to tear up Sam Said, "Oh Aaron, I've got bad news. She couldn't take not having you…son…she killed herself."

Aaron broke down. He knew that life would never be the same without Emily. He also knew she felt the same.

After a while he decided he would call Emily's parents. They could not believe it. They all agreed it would be too painful to see each

other. The Hiltons told him about the envelope Emily had left him. Aaron said to leave it on the little bench at the lighthouse. And he would get it.

That evening he went out to the cliff and found the envelope with his name on it. He opened it. His did not contain a letter like Emily's parents'. Inside was her last work of poetry. Aaron sat on the bench and read it over and over again.

The Sunset

My true love has been taken from me,
If I stay in this place the two of us can never be.

So as I plunge into the depths,
I hope to find my true love's caress.
But even after death
The one thing I will never forget—
This sunset.

After reading the poem for the last time,

Aaron walked to the edge of the cliff and looked down at the waves crashing against the jagged rocks below.

PART 3

Now I know your probably wondering why I stopped the story there. When you start a story you obviously want to finish it but, to tell the truth, this story hasn't ended yet. Please forgive me, I haven't properly introduced myself. I thought it would have more of an effect if I waited for the opportune time. My name is Aaron Parker. Many years have passed since my Emily died that dark, cold evening in December. I've seen several other wars, presidents assassinated, the turn of a century, myself growing older and older. Nothing stays the same—everything changes in some form or fashion. But one thing in my life never changed. It always remained a constant in my everyday living—my love for Emily. I haven't left the house in a while. There's no need to really. Nowadays you can have just about anything you want delivered to you. My neighbors are nice enough to take care of me when I need something. I guess they feel sorry for an old man who had his heart broken so many years ago. I don't feel sorry for myself though. I wouldn't trade the time I had with Emily for

anything this world could offer me. I treasured that time with a passion as furious as hurricane winds. Nobody can take those memories from me—they're all I have left. Sometimes I cry—sometimes I laugh. But mostly I'm just content when I sit in my old wooden rocker and reminisce about the past. Not a day goes by that I don't think about her and not a night passes me by without her entering my dreams. Every time I close my eyes I see her beautiful face, hair blowing in the breeze, set against that gorgeous sunset—the sunset.

THE END

BACKWOODS

CHAPTER 1

At six a.m. on a cold November morning, it was breakfast time for most of the civilians living in the small southern town of Gadsden, Alabama. It was a Saturday, and all the football fans were anticipating either Alabama's game against Mississippi, or Auburn's game against LSU depending on which team you pulled for.

Jeff and Mary Horn however were not football fans, but they were looking forward to something that they liked to do very much, jogging. They had started this two years ago when the doctor had told Jeff, at his regular checkup, that he needed to start exercising and watching what he eats because of his high cholesterol. So they decided to jog through the backwoods that were behind their house. And since that doctor's visit they rarely ever missed a nice morning run through the backwoods.

Jeff and Mary's sixteen-year old daughter, Jessica liked to stay up late Friday night and sleep in on Saturday mornings. Her bedroom door made a loud squeak when you opened, so not wanting to wake her they just left it shut.

"Sixteen-year old girls need their beauty sleep." Jeff said, laughing.

"That's true," Mary said, "I got as much as I could and look how good I turned out."

They both had a good laugh, and then headed to the kitchen to get their coffee. Jeff took cream and sugar in his, and Mary liked hers black. They sipped their coffee by the fireplace and by the time they were finished they were ready for their run.

The woods had a small path cut through the trees. It circled all the way back around to their house. In all, the path equaled about a mile. The fog was kind of heavy that morning but they could still see pretty well. About ten minutes into their run they both spotted something red

in a little clearing to the left. When they got to it they saw that it was a tent. A smothered campfire was still smoking a little. When Jeff and Mary looked just left of the tent they saw something very alarming. All they could see was a person's hands bound with barbwire and fastened around the tree! The couple rushed to the other side of the tree and couldn't believe what they saw. It was their daughter Jessica that was tied to the tree. She was dead. She had been stripped of her clothes and there were two incisions on her chest, they were in the shape of a cross. Mary burst into tears and almost fainted. Jeff grabbed her before she fell and held her for several minutes. He called the police just as soon as Mary could stand on her own. After calling, He broke down himself and Mary put her arms around him. Standing there in the fog, confused, upset, on the edge of hysteria, waiting for the police to arrive, were the most excruciatingly painful moments of their lives.

CHAPTER 2

Doug Ellis and Rick Daniels were the first two detectives on the Scene. They found Jeff and Mary Horn standing out in the woods with their arms around each other.

"Sir, Ma'am, I'm Detective Ellis and this is my partner Detective Daniels.

"How are y'all doing?" asked Detective Daniels.

"How do you think?" Answered Jeff. "Our daughter is dead."

"We are very sorry for your loss." Detective Ellis

said.

"That was obviously a very stupid question, I apologize, is there anything we can do for you?" asked Detective Daniels.

"Yeah catch the horrible monster that did this to our baby" Mary said sobbing.

"That's what we're here for ma'am. Detective Ellis said.

By this time the sounds of sirens were getting closer. In less than two minutes cops and paramedics were all over the place. In ten minutes the whole area was secured by police tape and Jeff and Mary were being checked out by one of the paramedics. Detective Ellis and Daniels didn't want the crime scene to get contaminated so they got to their Examination of the body and the murder scene ASAP.

Detective Doug Ellis, a forty-two year old veteran on the police force, had been teamed up with the rookie, Rick Daniels, a month ago. This

was going to be the twenty-three year olds first real murder case and to be honest Doug was a little nervous about how the youngster was going to react when he saw the body. But so far he was doing fine, if he was nervous or the slightest bit uneasy he didn't show it. Doug thought that that showed his experience even at his young age.

"Jessica Horn, sixteen years old, Caucasian, female," Detective Ellis started his examination, "Hands bound behind her back around a tree with barbwire, two incisions on her chest in the shape of a cross, victim is totally nude, no signs of rape, can't determine cause of death.

"Ok, do you see anything else?" Doug asked.

"Let me see…Hey look there is dirt under her fingernails, maybe she got a piece of the perp too." Rick pointed out.

"Hopefully so, good eye detective."

"Alright you can examine the surroundings."

"Yes sir, Let's see here. There is a red tent that sleeps three to four people with three sleeping bags in it, a smothered campfire that looks like it was put out around four or five ours ago maybe a little less, claw marks from the tree to about three feet away from the tree, looks like the victim was dragged from the tent to the tree, the tent has three sleeping bags in it but no sign of anybody else, no sign of the victims clothes. Ok I think that's all.

"Perfect," Doug answered, "This looks like a campout gone horribly wrong, Let's go talk to the parents again."

"Ok."

The two detectives started walking back to the edge of the woods where the parents of Jessica Horn were sitting on the edge of the back of an ambulance. They still looked pretty shaken up. And they had every right to be.

"Mr. Horn, is it ok if we ask you and your wife just a few more questions?" Detective Ellis

asked.

"Just a few more, answered Jeff, "But just to me. We are really tired and we would like some peace and quiet. And my wife is in no shape to answer questions."

"Thank you sir, did your daughter have any camping plans for last night?"

"None that we knew of. We thought she was in her room asleep."

"Well there were three sleeping bags in the tent. We think that your daughter was camping out with a couple of friends but obviously something went haywire. But I swear to you that we will find Jessica's killer. Could we have the names of some of her friends so that we could question them?"

"Jessica was into the whole gothic thing. There isn't too many of them around so she didn't have very many friends, but her best friend is named Annette Claiborne. Talk to her and you might

find out who more of her friends were but Annette is the only one she ever brought to the house or talked about."

"Could we get her address please?"

"I'm sorry I don't remember it right now. My mind is going in a million different directions."

"That's ok. Did Jessica have a boyfriend?"

"No she never talked about boys, never even mentioned one."

"Ok thank you for your patience sir."

"Anything that will help in your investigation."

"Here is my card, if you or your wife remembers anything or find something call either me or Detective Daniels. Do you think we could stop by tomorrow and search Jessica's room, see if we can find anything?"

"Sure come by about two, is that ok?"

"Yeah that's fine. Ok well we have held y'all up long enough, we are gonna go. Take care now."

"Y'all do the same."

"Ok Rick let's go talk to Anette, see what her story is." Doug said.

"Let's go." Rick answered.

As the detectives walked through the November morning fog back to their car, Doug Ellis got a real bad feeling about everything that was going on, but he didn't voice his concern to Rick. He figured the young man had enough of his own rookie jitters to battle, without Doug's gut feeling. After all, he remembered how he felt on his first homicide case. The victim had been a six-year old girl who had been abducted, raped, and then suffocated to death. Still one of the worst cases he had ever had work. He could hardly eat for the whole first week. The detectives finally made it back to their car and drove off into the fog.

CHAPTER 3

By nine a.m. the two detectives were pulling into the local coffee shop where they had their coffee every morning. They usually got there around seven but they were late this morning because of the body that had been found earlier that morning. The coffee shop wasn't very big but it was just the right quiet little place that they needed to think. Detective Ellis ordered his usual cup of black coffee and a bagel and Detective Daniels had a cappuccino, then they sat down at a table in the back.

"So Doug," Rick started, "Any ideas on the case yet?"

"It's hard to say for sure but something just doesn't seem right to me, something is just out of place but I can't put my finger on it." Doug answered.

"Yeah I know what you mean."

The two detectives sat there quietly for the next ten minutes sipping their coffee until they were almost finished.

"So, what is our plan of action?" Detective Daniels asked.

"The first thing we are going to do is go have a talk with Miss Claiborne and see what we can find out. After that we will just have to see. Are you ready?"

"Yeah, let's go."

The detectives paid and then walked back to their squad car. Before they could talk to Annette Claiborne they had to get her address since Mr. Horn had been too shaken up to remember it, so Detective Ellis got on the radio.

"Hello dispatch."

"Yes."

“This is Detective Ellis, I need an address for one Annette Claiborne please.”

“Ok hold on one second… Yes it’s 143 Heart Street.”

“Thank you very much.”

“No problem.”

“You know where Heart Street is don’t you Rick?” Doug asked.

“Yeah, we’ll be there in no time.

CHAPTER 4

There was no answer at 143 Heart Street but as the detectives were leaving the door the neighbor of the claibornes, Mrs. Dunston, stopped them.

“You won’t find anybody home there.”

“And why is that ma’am?” Detective Ellis asked.

Mrs. Dunston went on to explain to the detectives how Molly Claiborne was a single mom who worked full time and often pulled eighteen-hour shifts just to make ends meet. The husband had ran out on them a couple years back and the troubled teenage daughter, Anette, was rarely at home.

“Well thank you Mrs. Dunston, here is my card, if you see one of them come home would you give me a call please?” Doug asked.

“Sure, sure, is that girl in some kind of trouble?”

“No ma’am we just need to talk to her.” Rick answered.

“Hey come to think of it you might check the woods back behind the house, her and her friends build a fire out there some nights and last night I remember seeing the shadows from the flame dancing around off the trees.”

The detectives just looked at each other and excused themselves from the little old lady. That bad feeling that Doug had had earlier that morning was now returning. This time it was them who discovered the horrible crime scene in the woods behind the Claiborne house. It was identical to the Horn murder scene except in one aspect. Barbwire around the hands, naked, red tent with *two* sleeping bags this time, and of course the small incision of a cross in the middle of her chest.

CHAPTER 5

What was the meaning of one less sleeping bag? The detectives didn't know but one thing was inexplicably clear, this was not a single homicide and they might even be dealing with a serial killer let alone a deranged psychopath.

"We have to go back to the Horn's and look in their daughters room now," Doug said, "We don't have time to wait here for a warrant to search this house."

"I'm driving." Rick said.

They made it to the Horn's house in ten minutes and knocked on the door. After a few seconds Mr. Horn answered the door.

"Officers, have you found anything?"

"We have to look in your daughters room now," Detective Ellis said, "there has been another murder."

“We found anette dead just like Jessica.” Daniels added.

“Sure come on in.”

Jeff Horn lead the detectives to Jessica’s room and opened the door for them then left saying he couldn’t bear to go in there yet. They looked around several minutes before Doug found what was right in front of their eyes. There was a picture in a frame turned over face down on her nightstand. When he picked it up he couldn’t believe what he saw. It was a picture of Jessica and Anette. In red ink Jessica’s face had an **X** over it and and Anette’s was circled.

“My god!” Rick exclaimed. “The perp wanted us to know who was next.”

CHAPTER 6

Five minutes later the detectives were back in the car and on their way to Anette's house. They had gotten the warrant to search the house in case her mother hadn't gotten there yet.

They arrived and kicked in the door when there was no answer and started to search the house. Finally finding the girls bedroom they were not surprised to find a picture turned face down on the nightstand. This picture had three girls in it, Jessica and Anette, both having their faces X'd out, and another girl with her face circled. She had dark black hair and black lipstick, just like the other two, and would be attractive if not for all the gothic style make up.

"We have to find out who this girl is right now." Doug said.

They went back to the station and ran the picture through the system and thankfully this girl was in there for minor theft. Daphney Grey was her name. They got her address, 1865 West Holland Avenue, and headed there. After there was no answer at the front door they went around to the back and found a note with two numbers on it.

34.2 and 56.7.

“It’s longitude and latitude.” Rick said.

They determined where this was in town and made that their destination. It was no surprise to Doug when they ended up on an old dirt road and when that dead ended into woods, Rick said…

“It’s just a little ways further north, we’ll have to hoof it.”

CHAPTER 7

Setting out on foot the detectives entered the dense and muggy Alabama backwoods again. It didn't take them long to find Daphney Grey playing the star role in yet another gruesome campfire horror. All the props were there. The barbwire cutting into the hands leaving roadways of blood rolling down her arms. Ashes already burnt out from the macabre night. The red tent with only one sleeping bag. But this time there was another change to the scene besides the number of sleeping bags. The incision of the cross was no longer small. This cross was enormous, it went from her neck all the way past her navel and crossed both bare breasts.

"She was tortured much more than the other two" Rick said. "Do you think it means anything?"

“It could mean something or absolutely nothing, there is no telling with this maniac. Call dispatch, get the team out here.”

CHAPTER 8

Back at the station the detectives had all the evidence layed out in front of them. A search of the girls house turned up no clues, no pictures turned face down, no nothing. Apparently she had been living there alone, her mother was dead and her father had been away on business for at least a month.

Some parent he is, Doug had thought to himself.

"So does the fact that he left no clues as to another victim mean that he is done?" Rick wondered out loud.

"Guys like this usually don't end it like this. He either will continue because he enjoys it or he has some kind of plan," Doug said, "but I just cant figure out what this guy has up his sleeve"

Forensics had turned up zilch as far as the

dirt under the Horn girls fingernails but the detectives were about to get some help from the medical examiner.

The phone on detective Ellis's desk rings.

"This is Ellis."

"Yes detective this is Doctor Stevens, I examined all three bodies and have determined time of death. The last victim you found, Mrs Grey, she was killed between the hours of one and two AM. The first two victims were both killed between four and five AM."

Detective Ellis thanked the doctor and hung up the phone. Then he related the information to his partner.

"There is no way that the perp would have had time to kill Jessica and Anette and set up the sites in an hours time. We didn't even think about the possibility of two perps." Rick said.

And that's when it hit him.

“What if the sleeping bags indicate how many victims are left in their plan, when we found Jessica there was three bags. With Anette two and with Daphne just one.”

“If that’s the case then that means there is one more left.” Doug said.

“But he didn’t leave us any clues as to the next victim.”

“No he didn’t leave us a picture, that doesn’t mean there aren’t any clues.”

“Lets look at the last scene again.”

The detectives looked over everything from the last crime scene, they sat there for at least half an hour.

“The increased size of the cross has to be the clue. Apparently it has something to do with religion or the occult.” Rick said.

The map of the town was on a large tripod in the office and they had marked the spots where they had found the girls with red push pens. Doug Ellis glanced up at it for what had to be the hundreth time but this time the proverbial light switch flicked on.

CHAPTER 9

The three red push pens had made an exact triangle on the map. Detective Ellis realized that all the map needed was a pushpen on the southern end to make a cross.

“That’s gotta be where the last victim is Rick its just gotta be.” Doug had exclaimed.

They were already on their way to Saint Mary’s Baptist church, which was the only church on the south side of town, but they had no idea what was in store for them when they got there.

On arrival it was already dark and there were no cars in the parking lot. When they got to the church stoop telling them they had came to the right spot was a note nailed to the door. It read:

Dear detectives,

We knew you would come here, after all we did lead you here. I hope you had as much fun chasing down clues all day as we did planting them. We are sorry all this had to happen you see we are very religious people. But when thing threaten the sanctity of our religion vengance must take place. The girls were warned not to mess with the things of the devil, not to dress in black and wear disgusting make up but they refused to listen. Lord knows we tried everything with our daughter but nothing worked and in the end she had to be punished. So did the other two because they had drug her into it, had gotten her interested in the wicked things, works of the flesh. Did you pick up on the number of sleeping bags left detectives? We hope you didn't think they were the number of victims because it could seem that way. No they resembled the number of crime scenes you would visit today. Please don't think there is only one victim left because in all actuality there is two.
Sincerely,
Joe & Mary Horn

CHAPTER 10

When detective Ellis finished reading the letter he looked at detective Daniels in sheer astonishment. They both upholstered their guns and opened the church doors to face the Horns.

CHAPTER 11

When the detectives opened the doors to the church they heard a click and didn't have time to realize that the doors had been rigged two shotguns on either side of the opening. They had walked into a trap. It was the first case they had ever worked together. It as the last case they ever worked together.

CHAPTER 12

Jeff and Mary Horn woke up the next Saturday morning bright and early. Most people in Alabama were looking forward to Alabama's game against Tennessee or Auburn's game against some little school from Arkansas. But the Horns weren't football fans. They rarely missed a jog however after the doctor told Jeff that he had high cholesterol. Yes they rarely ever missed a jog and today would be no different. After they had their coffee and finished reading the newspaper, especially the article on the mysterious church fire from late last Saturday night that had turned up what were believed to be two local detectives, they left their house and briskly jogged off into the backwoods.

THE END

THE GREATEST

A Poem

The Greatest

When you think of a great man,

What comes to mind?

Maybe a sports athlete,

Maybe a talented novelist,

Maybe a prominent man of politics.

But all of these men ***try*** to be great,

Spend their whole life trying.

When I think of a great man, however,

I think of one with kindness,

Meekness,

Self-sacrificing,

Faithful and bold.

A man that let those qualities shine like a pearl.

The greatest man that ***never tried*** to be.

I think of Earl.